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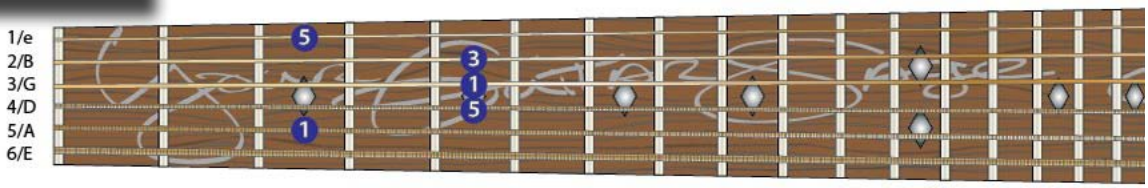
THE "CAGED" SYSTEM

THE CAGED system is a great method for memorizing and visualizing chords on the fretboard. Have you ever wanted to play a particular chord at a different place on the fretboard? Did you know that you can play the same chord name in several different places on the guitar neck? Notice that the 1st five diagrams below are based off of chords C, A, G, E, D (open major chords). Each chord form below is a C major, however you can see that their shapes are based off of the open major chord forms C, A, G, E and D. By now you can see why we call this the CAGED system. Notice the last diagram showing all five chord forms overlapping on one fretboard. This means that if a song called for a C chord, you could play any one of those forms below and it would sound good.

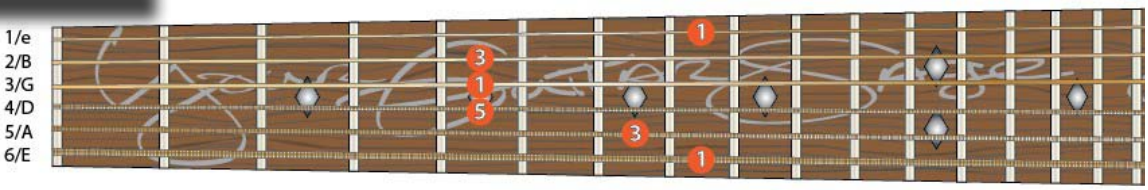
The "1's" below represent the tonic, key or root. In this case, the root is C. The "3's" and "5's" represent the 3rd and 5th scale notes of the major scale (see Introduction to Chord Construction).

C Chord Form

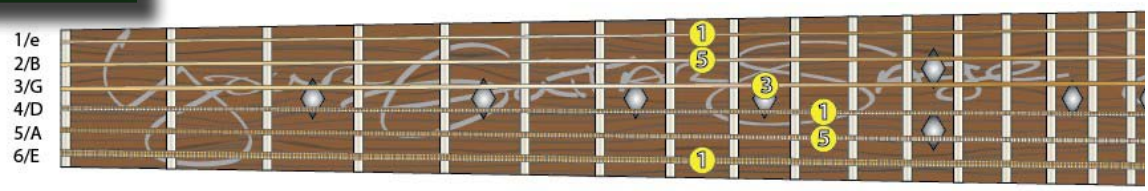
A Chord Form



G Chord Form

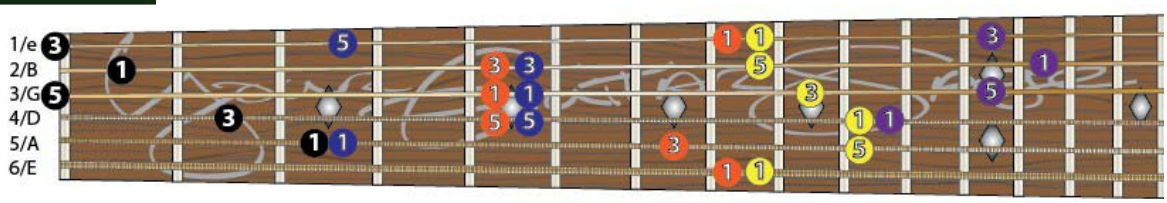


E Chord Form



D Chord Form

All Forms Together



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Practicing With the CAGED System

So now that you understand how the CAGED system works, just how can we practice it to make us better players? Before we go any further, I'd like to dissect this study into two parts: ***concept*** and ***fingering***.

Understanding the CAGED concept without picking up your guitar is part 1 of this equation. That is to say, you should be able to understand the concept "on paper" before attempting to actually play the chords. Playing these chords fully or partially is yet a whole other story, but is our part 2. That part will take a bit longer, but don't get discouraged! Remember, these are "open" chords that we will be attempting to assemble like bar chords. We don't have to play every note in the chord, but it's nice to know that we can if we should want or need to. Firstly, you MUST know/memorize how to play the open chords of C, A, G, E and D. If you don't know how to do this already, you REALLY need to brush up on those chords before going any further. If you get any deeper without that knowledge, it will only confuse you. Knowing how the forms fall on the guitar neck is crucial to understanding and mapping the fretboard. I use this knowledge dozens of times a day so rest assured that learning this new concept will revolutionize how you view the fretboard. ***Don't get lazy!***

Complete this and you will understand the fretboard better than a lot of other players out there today! Once the concept makes sense (see the previous page and supplemental video in the directory), we can then tackle the fingering. I must emphasize that, although I show the entire chord, we don't have to play it in its entirety; in some cases it may be VERY inconvenient to do so.

So here is the method that I use myself to master these chords - see the supplemental video found in the directory for the video representation of this section.

Play the open C chord. As with all these chords make sure that each note that should be heard, IS heard. This will, of course, be easier for those that have had more time on the guitar. Now, for the "A" form of the C chord, lay your 1st finger across strings 5-1(A through high E) at the 3rd fret. Make sure that your 1st finger is totally straight. For most people this means dropping the thumb down behind the neck so that the tip of your thumb is touching the bottom half of the neck. Unless you have Martian fingers, or are Jimi Hendrix, you most likely will not be able to hang your thumb over the top of the neck AND play a bar chord. Trust me, learn it the right way and then "cheat" later if you master this technique. Okay, back to that "A" form. The first finger should be pressing down those 5 strings that I just mentioned. The rest of the bar can be played a couple of different ways; depending on the application, I use both. The first way you will play the 5th fret of strings 4, 3 and 2 with fingers 2, 3 and 4 (in that order). The other way is to play strings 4, 3 and 2 with finger 3 barred. The only way to get that high E to sound with this method is to hyper-extend the third finger at the last knuckle (meaning bend it backwards a bit).

The G form is very tricky and difficult at first to play fully. First bar strings 4, 3 and 2 at the 5th fret with the 1st finger. Then, play string 5, fret 7 with the 2nd finger. Then string 6, fret 8 with the 3rd finger and finally the high E, fret 8 with the pinky. Getting cramps in your hand yet? You'll get it. The other way to play this chord is

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to play it partially - as I show in the video. Hanging in there? ***Don't give up!*** This stuff takes time; ***NO ONE*** just gets it right away. Myth and ego say that one person can do this and not the other. ***Don't buy into it!*** You will be just as much a player as Hendrix or Stevie Ray ***IF*** you practice like they did.

Okay, so the "E" form is much easier. In fact, if you know how to play a full F chord (at the 1st fret), then you know how to play this chord already. Just scootch it up to the 8th fret! If you don't know the F, then place your 1st finger at the 8th fret and lay it across all 6 strings (just like on the "A" form, you must drop that thumb and get your hand out in front of the fretboard a bit). Then place your 3rd finger on the A string at the 10th fret. Followed by the pinky on the D string at the 10th fret and the middle finger on the G string at the 9th fret. I'm purposely changing from string numbers to names (letters) because it's important that you know both.

Lastly, the "D" form is a little tricky, too. Place your 1st finger on the 10th fret of the D string. Then place the 2nd finger on the 12th fret of the G. Then place the 3rd finger on the 12th fret of the high E. Finally, place the pinky on the 13th fret of the B string. ***BAM!!*** Now you are playing the "D" form of the C chord. Now, let's do one more form because you are going to need it for keys other than C.

Since the "C" form in C is played open, we need to see what it would look like as a bar chord. So, for this example we are going to play a "C" form of the D chord. Place your pinky at the 5th fret of the A string. Then place the 3rd finger on the 4th fret of the D string. Place the 2nd finger on the 3rd fret of the B string. Finally, bar strings 1, 2 and 3 with the 1st finger at the 2nd fret. Now you have a movable C form. Get it?

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